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ABSTRACT

The University of Pennsylvania's foreign language requirement self-study resulted in re-evaluation of the existing language program. It revealed that most freshmen were not exempted from college second language study by standardized test scores and that the university's required courses were not producing the desired results. These findings suggest that a requirement based on length of study was inadequate. As a result, language departments established language proficiency requirements for graduation in place of course requirements. The French department adopted performance standards for oral interaction, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, writing, and culture at four levels that include specific skills and a specified standardized test score. Two years' experience with the revised language requirement has affected the university's language-learning environment in a variety of ways. Faculty involvement in program design and policy formation has increased, as has faculty time required for organizational work. Teaching assistants have become more realistic about student achievement goals and have gained a better sense of what constitutes a well-taught course. Greater awareness of curriculum design has stimulated development of methods and materials throughout the language program. Finally, although quantitative data concerning student achievement is not yet available, pass/fail enrollment data suggest a positive effect on student learning. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages provisional proficiency guidelines and their proposed scale for French 4 proficiency are appended. (MSE)

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PROFICIENCY IN CONTEXT: THE PENNSYLVANIA EXPERIENCE

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Every ten years or so a new movement seems to take hold of the language teaching profession. Each movement promises better and more rapid learning of a second language and brings with it new approaches, methods, techniques and materials. A brief retrospective glance identifies the era of grammar-translation, that of audio-lingual teaching, another focuses on communicative/interactional learning and, in the recent past, that of the notional-functional syllabus. (For discussion see, among others, Brown 1980; Clarke 1982; Richards and Rodgers 1982). Most recently, the term proficiency has come into popular usage. We are barraged with information about proficiency-based language instruction, proficiency standards, proficiency requirements and proficiency tests. While proficiency-oriented teaching cannot be equated with a method but should be regarded, rather, as an organizing principle or system (ACTFL 1982), the notion of proficiency-based instruction has already had an indisputable effect on the language teaching profession.

On a national level, recognition of the need to establish commonly understood and accepted proficiency standards is not new. The Report of the Modern Language Association-American Academy of Learned Society's (MLA-ACLS) Language Task Forces, completed in 1978 (Brod 1980), and that of the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies (1979) emphasized the need to set clearly defined, realistic proficiency goals for each level of study and to develop tests to measure such proficiency. Response to these recommendations was generated by a grant to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) to provide a "Design for Measuring and Communicating Foreign Language Proficiency" (ACTFL 1982). This project resulted in the ACTFL Provisional Proficiency Guidelines, which provide a series of "generic" and language-specific (French, Spanish, German) functionally defined proficiency standards for speaking, listening, reading, writing and culture. These guidelines identify sequential stages of development in language proficiency.

On a more personal level, we have long felt the need for a common and absolute set of standards against which we could meaningfully measure and identify the abilities of individual students. We are well aware of the meaninglessness of course grades and units of study, at least so far as basic language learning is concerned. We know that one school's A is another school's C, four semesters at one institution may be equal to two somewhere else. MLA Cooperative or College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) language achievement test scores tell us little about what students are able to *do* with the language. Efforts to place new students into the appropriate level language course serve to underscore the vagueness of a number of years of study as a measure of ability to use the language. (For detailed discussion see Hagiwara 1982).

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate how proficiency-based language instruction has operated within the context of one university's experience. The discussion will include background information regarding the perceived need to establish a proficiency requirement, details of that requirement for one language section at the university and a preliminary evaluation of the effects this requirement has had on language learning.

THE NEED TO ESTABLISH A PROFICIENCY REQUIREMENT

The College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania has maintained a foreign language requirement in one form or another since the mid-1800's.

While the number of hours and even the languages required to satisfy the requirement has changed over the years--Latin and Greek in the mid- and late-19th century with a switch to modern languages at the turn of the century--the basic catalog description has changed very little in that time and essentially not all in the 12-year period from 1968-1980. The 1980-81 *University of Pennsylvania Course of Study* described the foreign language requirement as follows:

> Every student is required to attain a certain competence in a foreign language. Such competence may be demonstrated either by passing a foreign language course numbered 4 (or equivalents)...or by the student's score in the Advanced Placement Test or the College Entrance Examination Board CEEB) Achievement Test or on a departmental placement examination.
>
> Students who are placed in an intermediate or advanced level language course upon entrance to the University may not receive credit for a lower level course in the same language. Students are admitted to first, second or third year courses in language according to the amount of work they have had in high school and their score in the CEEB test.
>
> Foreign language courses taken to fulfill the foreign language requirement as well as foreign language electives not being used in a major may be taken on a pass/fail basis.

The description may be disturbingly familiar to many readers. The problem, of course, is that what is in reality a "time" requirement is couched in other terms. At the University of Pennsylvania, as at many other institutions with language requirements, language competence has been evaluated primarily in terms of length of study. The catalog descriptions have traditionally begun by invoking such admirable goals as "competence," "performance" or even "proficiency," yet such competence or proficiency has tended to be measured by semester hours at worst and by scores on standardized multiple-choice discrete-point tests at best (Freed 1981a).

In 1979 the Advisory Committee on Language Instruction began what was to be a two-year examination of this longstanding foreign-language requirement. In the course of this two-year period many aspects of the language-learning experience at Pennsylvania were analyzed. As a result of their findings the committee decided to investigate the feasibility of redefining the requirement as a proficiency requirement.

Among the first facts that the committee considered were the following:

1. Only 33 percent of all College of Arts and Sciences matriculants at the University of Pennsylvanian present CEEB language achievement test scores upon entrance. Because students are placed into language classes according to their CEEB scores, this means that some 60 percent of all incoming freshmen have to be tested during or before the first week of classes. (A small percentage are exempt by virtue of Advanced Placement.)

2. Only one-third of those who present CEEB language scores upon entrance receive scores high enough (650 or above) to exempt them from further language study. Even if the minimum score were lowered to 600, no more than half of these students who present CEEB scores would be exempt from further study. In other words, some 75-80 percent of all entering freshmen have to take course work to satisfy the foreign-language requirement.

These data were both surprising and disturbing. We had anticipated that those who felt confident enough to take the CEEB language achievement tests would achieve relatively high scores. We would also have liked to believe that those who had spent valuable years of foreign-language study at the secondary level would have developed skills that would have exempted them from elementary- and intermediate-level language courses at the university level. Such was clearly not the case. These findings did not mean that college expectations were necessarily too high, or that secondary school achievement was too low. (Proponents of one or the other view are often all too quick to reach such conclusions.) They suggested, rather, that college and secondary levels of instruction lacked common goals or standards of evaluation.

The results of an internal testing program further convinced us of the inadequacy of a system which evaluates language learning almost exclusively in terms of length of study. The CEEB language achievement tests were administered to all students enrolled in levels 1-4 French, Spanish, Italian, German, Russian and Latin at the end of the Spring and Fall semesters, 1980. (These are the levels that constitute the four-semester language requirement.) Mean scores for students who were completing the fourth semester of study are shown below.[2] These data showed that, at the end of the required four semesters of study, our own students were not achieving the 650 minimum score that incoming freshmen needed for exemption from further language study. They also established the fact that there was a high correlation between CEEB scores and grades awarded. CEEB scores for A students were in almost all cases higher than those for B students, which in turn were higher than those for C students, etc., and they increased with level of study. This correlation, then, told us something about the nature of the skills we were teaching and testing.

Mean scores on CEEB language achievement tests for students completing a level 4 language course.

French	Spanish	Italian	German	Russian	Latin
558	533	561	575	593	580

[2]It should be understood that all students did not necessarily study language at Pennsylvania during four consecutive semesters. Many students had been placed into language levels 2, 3 or 4 upon entrance. The results for students completing one, two and three semesters of study in each of these languages have been computed and are reported in Freed (1981b).

Beyond this we had learned little about our students' abilities. We knew before we began our study that students were dissatisfied with what they were learning. They had continued to tell us that they wanted to learn to speak, that relevance for them meant the development of oral proficiency. However, the results of these two studies provided little information as to the functional oral proficiency of our students. For this we looked to the second part of our internal testing project.

In order to evaluate the oral skills of our students, we administered the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) Oral Proficiency Interview to a subset of the larger group. This oral interview was given to a sample of students who were completing French 3 during the 1980 academic year. Ten percent of the students were selected at random from those who volunteered to be interviewed. The FSI Interviews were given by those of us who were trained in the use of the standard FSI procedure at a 1980 Testing Kit Workshop.

The results of this study were again disappointing, but not surprising in view of what we already knew about the language skills of our students. The mean FSI score for this group of students was slightly more than 1+, or an *Intermediate-High* as defined by the *ACTFL Provisional Proficiency Guidelines* (ACTFL 1982).[3] Moreover, this 1+ was a *mean* score that represented a range of from 0+-2+, or from a *Novice-Low* to *Intermediate-High*.

This information further convinced us of the futility of a requirement based almost exclusively on length of study. It had become clear that many students who fulfilled the four-semester requirement remained unable to use the language in any meaningful way. While they had in fact satisfied a university requirement, they had experienced no personal satisfaction nor had they developed a useful skill.

Consideration of these data as well as the prevailing attitude toward the language requirement at the University of Pennsylvania led to a decision on the part of several languages departments, or sections within a department, to change the nature of the language requirement. It is important to clarify that not all language departments have made this decision.

September 1981 brought the first major change. At that time the French section of the Department of Romance Languages instituted a proficiency requirement based on a set of functionally defined proficiency standards. In September 1982 the German, Russian and Arabic Departments also replaced the time requirement with a proficiency requirement. While the details of the requirements vary from department to department, the principle remains the same: students must demonstrate proficiency in a variety of functional skills as measured by departmental language proficiency tests in order to meet the college language requirement. While most students take this test upon completion of the level 4

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[3]The 1+ designation is a rating used by the U.S. Government (see Adams and Frith 1979). It has been redefined by the *ACTFL Provisional Proficiency Guidelines* (ACTFL 1982) for academic use as an *Intermediate-High* on a (9 level) scale which progresses from *Novice-Low* to *Advanced*. See Appendix I for descriptions of these levels.

course, some choose to take it earlier, for example, upon completion of the level 3 course. There are also those who are unable to pass the test after four semesters of study, and these students are obliged to continue their study of the language until they earn a passing score. It is not within the scope of this paper to present a detailed description of the proficiency requirement as it exists in each department. For purposes of illustration the standards and policies adopted by the French section of the Department of Romance Languages are presented below.

THE PROFICIENCY REQUIREMENT IN THE FRENCH SECTION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ROMANCE LANGUAGES[4]

The proficiency categories, listed in the left-hand column of the chart on page 184 are as follows: Oral Interaction, Listening Comprehension, Reading Comprehension, Writing, and Culture. Temporarily, the CEEB language achievement tests are included with this set of five proficiency standards. The numbers 5, 10, 15 and 20 across the top of the chart represent the numerical scores for performance at each of the described levels.

The capsule descriptions corresponding to a score of 10 represent the performance levels needed to satisfy the proficiency requirement. For example, students must demonstrate oral language skills as described by an FSI rating of 1+ and listening comprehension skills that permit partial comprehension of factual news broadcasts and/or partial comprehension of native-speaker conversation. To demonstrate reading comprehension, they have to answer questions that require factual and inferential responses to literary texts and to provide a summary with the most salient features of a non-literary text correctly represented. To test writing proficiency, students are given guided composition tasks which require adequate vocabulary and some use of complex sentences beyond subject-verb-object organization. The standards for measuring competence in culture are still to be determined. In addition, students must achieve a score of 500 on the CEEB language achievement test in French.

Proficiency is determined by computing a composite score for all six portions of the test. A student is thus able to compensate for weakness in one area by excellence in another. To pass the proficiency test, students must achieve a minimum composite score of 10. (See Appendix II for a detailed description of the scoring procedure.)

Policies for implementing the requirement are as follows:

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[4]The proficiency standards described herein were adopted by the French section in the spring of 1981. It is anticipated that they will be revised at the end of the Spring 1983 academic term. The intention is to make the standards for satisfying the language proficiency requirement in French consistent with the *ACTFL Provisional Proficiency Guidelines*. The revised requirement will require students to speak at the level described by an Intermediate High and will most likely require them to write at the same level. In all likelihood the minimal level for reading will be that described as Advanced. For a description of the ACTFL guidelines see Appendix I.

DESCRIPTION OF FUNCTIONAL PROFICIENCY STANDARDS FOR FRENCH, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

SKILL AND METHOD OF TESTING	SCORE/PERFORMANCE LEVEL			
	5	10	15	20
	S-1	S-1+	S-2	S-2+
Oral Interaction (FSI Interview) (Adams and Frith, 1979, p. 13-15)	-able to satisfy routine travel needs and minimum courtesy requirements. Can ask and answer questions on very familiar topics, can understand very simple questions and statements, allowing for slowed speech, repetition, or paraphrase. vocabulary inadequate to express anything but the most elementary needs, errors in pronunciation and grammar are frequent, but can be understood; should be able to order a simple meal; ask for shelter; ask and give simple directions, make purchases and tell time. -linguistic elements usually limited to the present tense -avoir, aller, être; might have pidginized forms, and/or phrases without verbs	-exceeds S-1 primarily in vocabulary, can meet more complex travel and courtesy requirements, grammar weak and usually can't cope with social conversation. fluency may vary. -linguistically has a notion of the past tense but confuses uses and may occasionally fail to use. can use futur proche	-unable to satisfy most routine social demands and limited work requirements. Can handle with confidence most social situations including introductions and casual conversations about current events, work, family, autobiographical information, can get the gist of most conversations on non-technical subjects, speaking vocabulary sufficient to respond simply with circumlocutions; does not have thorough or confident control of grammar but distinguishes the future tense even if he doesn't fully control, uses the passé composé and l'imparfait although with error, may have negative, "depuis" with present, present and infinitive	-exceeds 2 in grammar or vocabulary; better comprehension -has control of the future still makes mistakes with the passé composé and l'imparfait. -usually no command of the conditional or subjunctive; must use passé composé correctly
Listening Comprehension (Review in writing radio broadcasts just heard - topic identification and salient features)	a few key words of factual news broadcasts; tour guide. -partial comprehension of slow careful simplified telephone speech	partial comprehension of factual news broadcast; partial comprehension of native speaker conversation; partial comprehension of normal phone conversations; partial comprehension of lectures or formal presentations on a subject with which he/she is familiar	-reasonably complete comprehension of phone speech, can detect affective components of speech -very good comprehension of factual news broadcasts, partial comprehension of news commentary and analysis; partial comprehension of movie sound tracks; can catch some words of popular songs, can get the gist of native speaker conversation	-complete comprehension of phone speech, can detect affective components of speech -very good comprehension of factual news broadcasts; partial comprehension of news commentary and analysis part; comprehension of movie sound tracks; can catch some words of popular songs; can get the gist of conversation
Reading Comprehension (Questions and summary of literary and non-literary texts)	-ability to interpret a) literary and b) non-literary texts: a) questions requiring factual responses b) summary of non-literary text to which the topic is correctly identified but which contains gross misstatement of information presented	-ability to interpret a) literary and b) non-literary texts: a) questions requiring factual and inferential responses b) summary of non-literary text in native language	-ability to interpret a) literary and b) non-literary texts: a) questions requiring factual, interpretive and inferential responses b) summary of non-native text in native language	-ability to interpret a) literary and b) non-literary texts: a) questions requiring factual, interpretive, inferential and stylistic responses b) summary of non-literary text to native language
Writing (Direct composition)	deficient vocabulary -can only write the most simple sentences; frequent spelling errors, many grammatical errors; lack of idiomatic usage	-adequate vocabulary for writing about familiar topics, some use of complex sentences beyond SVO organization, morphological problems remain but basic control of past, present and future evident, some idiomatic usage evident	-varied basic vocabulary, varied but somewhat limited syntactic patterns, fewer morphological problems, good use of idioms	-extensive vocabulary well developed use of various syntactic patterns, natural and well formed transition frequent use of idioms
Culture (To be determined)				
CEEB Language Achievement Test	450	500	550	600

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1. Students must receive a composite score of at least 10 on the proficiency test in order to be eligible for a grade in French 4. No letter grade is assigned for the test itself. Results are recorded as either pass or fail.

2. Students who have passed the test are given a course grade based on their cumulative performance throughout the semester. This grade is based on quizzes, homework, hour exams, etc. The content of many of these tests and assignments is similar to areas tested in the proficiency test.

3. Any relationship between the scoring system and A, B, C, D grades has been eliminated by using the categories 5, 10, 15, 20.

Students who fail the proficiency test are counseled on an individual basis. They are required to improve their performance on the portions of the test they failed, or raise their score on passed portions to achieve a composite average score of 10. Students in French 3 who believe they are eligible are also permitted to take the proficiency test.

PRELIMINARY IMPRESSIONS OF THE EFFECTS OF A PROFICIENCY-BASED LANGUAGE REQUIREMENT

At the conclusion of almost two years experience with the revised language requirement, we have attempted to evaluate the effects this requirement appears to have had on the language-learning environment at Pennsylvania (Freed 1982). With the exception of student scores on the proficiency test, the evaluation is preliminary and largely impressionistic. It is based on personal observations, discussions with those responsible for language instruction at this level, and on a questionnaire distributed to teaching assistants and to students completing the fourth semester of French in December 1982. Even at this early date, a number of important effects and ramifications are already evident. They may be divided into four general categories: effects on the faculty; effects on teaching assistants, including their training and attitudes; effects on the curriculum: materials and methods; and effects on students, test scores, attitudes and motivation. Test scores are reported for French only; all other comments pertain to all language groups. Each will be discussed in turn.

Effects on the Faculty

The most obvious effect of the institution of a proficiency requirement with respect to faculty is that it has promoted their involvement in decisions regarding elementary- and intermediate-language instruction. The decision to change the nature of the requirement and to implement specific standards required the consideration and participation of many faculty members who in recent years had not been called upon to think about the goals of language instruction at this level. While this new requirement does not involve senior faculty in the teaching of these courses, it has involved them in the testing or oral skills as one part of the comprehensive proficiency exam. In at least

two departments senior faculty now share the responsibility for interviewing hundreds of students using the ACTFL oral proficiency test.

A less positive feature of the proficiency requirement from a faculty perspective is the enormous amount of detailed organizational work that its implementation entails. This includes scheduling of oral interviews, tabulating total proficiency scores, and dealing with apprehensive students prior to the test as well as with indignant failing students following the test. This work typically falls not to senior faculty, but to untenured assistant professors. However, the reaction to date of those concerned has been not to doubt the wisdom of moving from a time to a proficiency requirement, but, rather, to search for more efficient ways of handling the bureaucratic details.

Effects on Teaching Assistants

Seen from the vantage point of language supervisors, the implementation of proficiency standards seems to have instilled in graduate teaching assistants a better sense of what is important at this level. Teaching assistants appear to be more realistic about goals for student achievement and less likely to think that grammar and grammatical exercises supplemented by a few reading and writing activities constitute a well-taught course. Those responsible for training teaching assistants have incorporated the notion of proficiency standards and proficiency testing into all aspects of their training; and subsequent observation of classroom instruction has shown that in preparing exercises and activities, TA's do tend to think more in terms of what speakers actually do with a language.

Responses of several teaching assistants to a questionnaire pertaining to the effect of the proficiency requirement corroborates the impression of faculty supervisors. Statements such as the following were frequent: "The proficiency requirement has had a positive effect on my own language teaching experience. I find that it motivates students and helps me develop proficiency oriented teaching and testing materials." "Proficiency oriented programs carry both the student and instructor beyond concern with sentence-level production to focus on more comprehensive language skills such as sustained conversation and listening comprehension. I've noticed in my classes that I teach not only language but extra-linguistic strategies for dealing with the real problems that one is confronted with in using a foreign language." "Proficiency makes students, even at the lowest level, aware of their own progress. Materials are designed to help students handle everyday situations."

Effects on the Curriculum: Materials and Methods

Commitment to a proficiency requirement has brought with it visible changes in course content. However, this observation should not be interpreted to mean that one has been the direct result of the other. Rather, recognition of the need for one has prepared the way for the other. In some instances a department had changed textbooks, adopted new methods, replaced the emphasis on literature with one on spoken skills, and revised testing techniques just prior to implementing the proficiency requirement. In such cases recognition of the need for curricular changes prepared the way for a somewhat radical transition

from a long-standing time requirement to a proficiency requirement. In other cases, the decision to revise basic language instruction by adopting standards of functional proficiency has resulted in curricular changes that demand different materials, adjustments in course emphases and more rigorous evaluation.

Regardless of what changes came first, language courses in these departments are now frequently characterized by a greater diversification of teaching techniques. These include techniques and materials that emphasize various types of listening comprehension, those that give students the opportunity to develop functional oral skills in context, more practical types of writing assignments, and a decreased emphasis on formal grammatical manipulation drills. There is general, if not absolute, recognition that it is the responsibility of each instructor to provide appropriate materials and techniques to help students develop the requisite functional skills.

In addition to greater emphasis on the more practical aspects of language use, the implementation of a proficiency requirement has resulted in a more integrated sequence of courses and improved articulation between elementary and intermediate courses. It is anticipated that this integration will ultimately lead to improved articulation between the secondary and college level.

Effects on Students: Test Scores, Attitude and Motivation

The most important data, those that can confirm or dispel our belief that a proficiency requirement will result in improved performance in foreign-language study, are not yet available. It will be a number of years until we are able to determine with certainty whether or not proficiency-based language instruction has improved language learning at Pennsylvania. The only data available which suggest a positive effect on learning attributable to the proficiency requirement is the effect it has had on pass/fail enrollments. As was mentioned in the introduction, Pennsylvania has traditionally permitted students to take a number of courses, including foreign languages, on a pass/fail basis. A pilot study on pass/fail in French has yielded two positive facts. First, fewer students are enrolled in these courses on a pass/fail basis and second, the letter grade value of a P (passing) grade has increased. In 1976, prior to the proficiency requirement, 23 percent of all P grades would have been A's or B's had letter grades been awarded; and well over 70 percent of all P grades would have been a C or lower. By contrast, in the fall of 1981, 55 percent of all P grades would have been A or B with a rough 45 percent at the C or lower level.

The following progress report on the first three administrations of the proficiency test in French are encouraging. At the conclusion of the fall semester 1981, when the proficiency test was first administered, 214 students took all 5 portions of the test. Eleven percent, or 24 students, failed the test. Of these, 3 were failing the course, 17 were borderline students whose final grades were D, and 4 were C students. No student with a final grade of A or B failed the test. The area most frequently failed was the oral interview followed by listening comprehension. All students who failed were required to improve their performance in order to satisfy the language requirement. At the conclusion of the spring 1982 semester, 232 students were tested, and 21 or 9 percent, failed. Of these, 11 received a final grade of D and 10 a final grade of C. Again, no A or B student failed the test. As in the preceding semester, more

students had difficulty with the oral interview than with any other portion of the test. The results at the end of the fall 1982 semester were roughly comparable: of 200 students tested, 26 (13 percent) failed to receive a passing composite score of 10.

The only section of the test for which a mean score has been computed is the CEEB. For both spring and fall 1982 semesters the mean CEEB score was 582. This compares favorably with the mean CEEB score of 558 established during the pre-proficiency evaluation period in 1980. While we did not expect to see a significant increase in CEEB scores, we were encouraged to learn that the reorientation of language teaching with an emphasis on functional proficiency did not adversely affect student performance on this test.

The curricular changes previously described have not gone unnoticed by students enrolled in these courses. To gather a sample of student opinion, students registered in level 4 French were asked to describe the effect of the proficiency requirement on their language-learning experience. They were asked to consider classroom methods, materials, course emphases, tests, motivation and anything else they seemed relevant. Of the 170 students who responded, many reported that they were more motivated than in the past because of the emphasis on the spoken language. Others commented that their increased motivation was due to more lively and varied classes. To our surprise, a note of regret was expressed by some that they were not being asked to read a literary text.

Many students have also attributed increased motivation and seriousness of purpose not to classroom activities per se but, rather, to the prospect or, as they perceive it, the *threat* of a proficiency test. A good deal of resentment was expressed toward the concept of a proficiency test. This view notwithstanding, there has been no decrease in enrollment in those language programs that have adopted a proficiency requirement. However, students do tend to be more outspoken about what they believe they are not getting in class. In retrospect they also state that they find the *prospect* of the exam far worse than the experience itself.

Not surprisingly, along with the good news there is also some bad. The most discouraging, yet perhaps the most useful outcome of this evaluation has been the revelation of student attitudes. The best summary of student opinion would be simply to say that for them "a language requirement by any other name is still a language requirement." Roughly one-third of those who responded to the questionnaire vehemently expressed their dissatisfaction at the mere idea of a proficiency examination. It was clear from their responses that these students were reaching not to the value of a proficiency as opposed to a time requirement but, rather, to the need for a requirement in the first place. That is, these students were addressing the issue of a foreign-language requirement rather than that of proficiency standards. This expression of student attitudes was instructive in itself. It clearly showed us that the implementation of a proficiency requirement must be accompanied by a thoroughgoing presentation of the concept of functionally defined proficiency standards and their place in the curriculum.

CONCLUSION

The experience at the University of Pennsylvania has provided a context in which we can evaluate both the need for proficiency-based language instruction and its potential success. A review of the experience points to several reasons for adopting proficiency standards and a proficiency requirement.

The first relates to the need for absolute standards, absolute in the sense that they relate to the competence of native speakers, the knowledge such speakers have which enable them to use language correctly and appropriately within ever varying communicative contexts. Such proficiency standards do not correspond to length of study; acquisition time will vary from student to student, school to school and semester to semester. But the understanding of what the second-language learner should be able to do with language, in terms of content, function and degree of accuracy, should remain constant.

This might be the appropriate place to suggest that we must resist slogans. We have survived the audio-lingual era and have learned to contend with numerous misrepresentations of the concept of communicative competence. It is clear that language use and language learning are multifaceted and cannot be neatly compartmentalized into a restricted set of skills. Some research suggests that if we teach only communicative survival skills we risk producing students who can satisfy basic survival needs but who have difficulty progressing beyond this minimal level to acquire control of increasingly complex syntactic and stylistic features (Higgs and Clifford 1981). By contrast, students who learn to do grammatical drills and transformations and fill in the blanks are good at just that; but, as we all know, that has precious little to do with using language correctly and appropriately (Savignon 1972).

Secondly, proficiency standards based on content, function, and form facilitate articulation between levels, whether from high school to college or within each of these programs. At the same time that articulation is improved, placement procedures should become easier. If we establish a common set of standards, recognized and accepted by teachers and students at all levels, it will be far easier to place new students at the appropriate level of study. Moreover, the definition and common use of such standards should serve students and the community beyond the educational sector. If we adhere, more or less, to what has been called a "common yardstick," future employers will be able to evaluate students' skills in a sensible way that cannot be communicated in a transcript filled with A's, P's, for PASS, or even C's.

Finally, proficiency-based language instruction should prepare students to use language in an unlimited number of contexts which will include but not be limited to literary study.

The observed effects of the proficiency requirement on language study at the University of Pennsylvania suggest that important changes have begun to take place. There is increased faculty awareness of, interest and involvement in decisions concerning basic language instruction. There is more cooperation between the teaching assistants who teach these courses, as well as evidence of more creative teaching with increased emphasis on language use both written and oral. We have also observed articulation in the sequence of elementary and intermediate courses.

There is also evidence that the proficiency examination looms as a threat to many students. To the extent that this is true, the resultant learner anxiety may in fact be a negative influence on language learning. Only time, and close monitoring of student attitudes and achievement, will tell. In the meantime, it is clear that the emphasis must be on the creation of proficiency standards and on the understanding of these standards by *all* those involved in the language learning process. To the extent that the emphasis is on tests and testing, real changes will not necessarily occur. In fact, the terms proficiency standards or proficiency requirements could easily become as empty as were the former catalog descriptions that invoked the term "competence," but really meant "time." Perhaps more than ever before, we must provide for and maintain an intimate connection between training, teaching and testing.

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APPENDIX I: ACTFL PROVISIONAL PROFICIENCY GUIDELINES

Provisional Generic Descriptions--Speaking

Novice-Low Unable to function in the spoken language. Oral production is limited to occasional isolated words. Essentially no communicative ability.

Novice-Mid Able to operate only in a very limited capacity within very predictable areas of need. Vocabulary limited to that necessary to express simple elementary needs and basic courtesy formulae. Syntax is fragmented, inflections and word endings frequently omitted, confused or distorted and the majority of utterances consist of isolated words or short formulae. Utterances rarely consist of more than two or three words and are marked by frequent long pauses and repetition of an interlocutor's words. Pronunciation is frequently unintelligible and is strongly influenced by first language. Can be understood only with difficulty, even by persons such as teachers who are used to speaking with non-native speakers or in interactions where the context strongly supports the utterance.

Novice-High Able to satisfy immediate needs using learned utterances. Can ask questions or make statements with reasonable accuracy only where this involves short memorized utterances or formulae. There is no real autonomy of expression, although there may be some emerging signs of spontaneity and flexibility. There is a slight increase in utterance length but frequent long pauses and repetition of interlocutor's words still occur. Most utterances are telegraphic and word endings are often omitted, confused or distorted. Vocabulary is limited to areas of immediate survival needs. Can differentiate most phonemes when produced in isolation but when they are combined in words or groups of words, errors are frequent and, even with repetition, may severely inhibit communication even with persons used to dealing with such learners. Little development in stress and intonation is evident.

Intermediate-Low Able to satisfy basic survival needs and minimum courtesy requirements. In areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics, can ask and answer simple questions, initiate and respond to simple statements, and maintain very simple face-to-face conversations. When asked to do so, is able to formulate some questions with limited constructions and much inaccuracy. Almost every utterance contains fractured syntax and other grammatical errors. Vocabulary inadequate to express anything but the most elementary needs. Strong interference from native language occurs in articulation, stress and intonation. Misunderstandings frequently arise from limited vocabulary and grammar and erroneous phonology but, with repetition, can generally be understood by native speakers in regular contact with foreigners attempting to speak their language. Little precision in information

conveyed owing to tentative state of grammatical development and little or no use of modifiers.

Intermediate-Mid Able to satisfy some survival needs and some limited social demands. Is able to formulate some questions when asked to do so. Vocabulary permits discussion of topics beyond basic survival needs such as personal history and leisure time activities. Some evidence of grammatical accuracy in basic constructions, for example, subject-verb agreement, noun-adjective agreement, some notion of inflection.

Intermediate-High Able to satisfy most survival needs and limited social demands. Shows some spontaneity in language production but fluency is very uneven. Can initiate and sustain a general conversation but has little understanding of the social conventions of conversation. Developing flexibility in a range of circumstances beyond immediate survival needs. Limited vocabulary range necessitates much hesitation and circumlocution. The commoner tense forms occur but errors are frequent in formation and selection. Can use most question forms. While some word order is established, errors still occur in more complex patterns. Cannot sustain coherent structures in longer utterances or unfamiliar situations. Ability to describe and give precise information is limited. Aware of basic cohesive features such as pronouns and verb inflections, but many are unreliable, especially if less immediate in reference. Extended discourse is largely a series of short, discrete utterances. Articulation is comprehensible to native speakers used to dealing with foreigners, and can combine most phonemes with reasonable comprehensibility, but still has difficulty in producing certain sounds, in certain positions, or in certain combinations, and speech will usually be labored. Still has to repeat utterances frequently to be understood by the general public. Able to produce some narration in either past or future.

Advanced Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements. Can handle with confidence but not with facility most social situations including introductions and casual conversations about current events, as well as work, family, and autobiographical information; can handle limited work requirements, needing help in handling any complications or difficulties. Has a speaking vocabulary sufficient to respond simply with some circumlocutions; accent, though often quite faulty, is intelligible; can usually handle elementary constructions quite accurately but does not have thorough or confident control of the grammar.

Advanced Plus Able to satisfy most work requirements and show some ability to communicate on concrete topics relating to particular interests and special fields of competence. Generally strong in either grammar or vocabulary, but not in both. Weaknesses or unevenness in one of the foregoing or in

pronunciation result in occasional miscommunication. Areas of weakness range from simple constructions such as plurals, articles, prepositions, and negatives to more complex structures such as tense, usage, passive constructions, word order, and relative clauses. Normally controls general vocabulary with some groping for everyday vocabulary still evident. Often shows remarkable fluency and ease of speech, but under tension or pressure language may break down.

Superior — Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics. Can discuss particular interests and special fields of competence with reasonable ease. Vocabulary is broad enough that speaker rarely has to group for a word; accent may be obviously foreign; control of grammar good; errors virtually never interfere with understanding and rarely disturb the native speaker.

Provisional Generic Descriptions--Listening

Novice-Low — No practical understanding of the spoken language. Understanding limited to occasional isolated words, such as cognates, borrowed words, and high frequency social conventions. Essentially no ability to comprehend even short utterances.

Novice-Mid — Sufficient comprehension to understand some memorized words within predictable areas of need. Vocabulary for comprehension limited to simple elementary needs and basic courtesy formulae. Utterances understood rarely exceed more than two or three words at a time and ability to understand is characterized by long pauses for assimilation and by repeated requests on the listener's part for repetition, and/or a slower rate of speech. Confuses words that sound similar.

Novice-High — Sufficient comprehension to understand a number of memorized utterances in areas of immediate need. Comprehends slightly longer utterances in situations where the context aids understanding, such as at the table, in a restaurant/store, in a train/bus. Phrases recognized have for the most part been memorized. Comprehends vocabulary common to daily needs. Comprehends simple questions/statements about family members, age, address, weather, time, daily activities and interests. Misunderstandings arise from failure to preceive critical sounds or endings. Understands even standard speech with difficulty but gets some main ideas. Often requires repetition and/or a slowed rate of speed for comprehension, even when listening to persons such as teachers who are used to speaking with non-natives.

Intermediate-Low	Sufficient comprehension to understand utterances about basic survival needs, minimum courtesy and travel requirements. In areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics, can understand non-memorized material, such as simple questions and answers, statements, and face-to-face conversations in the standard language. Comprehension areas include basic needs: meals, lodging, transportation, time, simple instructions (e.g., route directions) and routine commands (e.g., from customs officials, police). Understands main ideas. Misunderstandings frequently arise from lack of vocabulary or faulty processing of syntactic information often caused by strong interference from the native language or by the imperfect and partial acquisition of the target grammar.
Intermediate-Mid	Sufficient comprehension to understand simple conversations about some survival needs and some limited social conventions. Vocabulary permits understanding of topics beyond basic survival needs such as personal history and leisure time activities. Evidence of understanding basic constructions, for example, subject-verb agreement, noun-adjective agreement; evidence that some inflection is understood.
Intermediate-High	Sufficient comprehension to understand short conversations about most survival needs and limited social conventions. Increasingly able to understand topics beyond immediate survival needs. Shows spontaneity in understanding, but speed and consistency of understanding uneven. Limited vocabulary range necessitates repetition for understanding. Understands commoner tense forms and some word order patterns, including most question forms, but miscommunication still occurs with more complex patterns. Can get the gist of conversations, but cannot sustain comprehension in longer utterances or in unfamiliar situations. Understanding of descriptions and detailed information is limited. Aware of basic cohesive features such as pronouns and verb inflections, but many are unreliably understood, especially if other material intervenes. Understanding is largely limited to a series of short, discrete utterances. Still has to ask for utterances to be repeated. Some ability to understand the facts.
Advanced	Sufficient comprehension to understand conversations about routine social conventions and limited school or work requirements. Able to understand face-to-face speech in the standard language, delivered at a normal rate with some repetition and rewording, by a native speaker not used to dealing with foreigners. Understands everyday topics, common personal and family news, well-known current events, and routine matters involving school or work; descriptions and narration about current, past and future events; and essential points of discussion or speech at an elementary level on topics in special fields of interest.

Advanced Plus	Sufficient comprehension to understand most routine social conventions, conversations on school or work requirements, and discussions on concrete topics related to particular interests and special fields of competence. Often shows remarkable ability and ease of understanding, but comprehension may break down under tension or pressure, including unfavorable listening conditions. Candidate may display weakness or deficiency due to inadequate vocabulary with some hesitant understanding of everyday vocabulary still evident. Can sometimes detect emotional overtones. Some ability to understand between the lines, i.e., to make inferences.
Superior	Sufficient comprehension to understand the essentials of all speech in standard dialects, including technical discussions within a special field. Has sufficient understanding of face-to-face speech, delivered with normal clarity and speed in standard language, on general topics and areas of special interest; understands hypothesizing and supported opinions. Has broad enough vocabulary that rarely has to ask for paraphrasing or explanation. Can follow accurately the essentials of conversations between educated native speakers, reasonably clear telephone calls, radio broadcasts, standard news items, oral reports, some oral technical reports, and public addresses on non-technical subjects. May not understand native speakers if they speak very quickly or use some slang or unfamiliar dialect. Can often detect emotional overtones. Can understand "between the lines" (i.e., make inferences).

Provisional Generic Descriptions--Reading

Novice-Low	No functional ability in reading the foreign language.
Novice-Mid	Sufficient understanding of the written language to interpret highly contextualized words or cognates within predictable areas. Vocabulary for comprehension limited to simple elementary needs such as names, addresses, dates, street signs, building names, short informative signs (e.g., no smoking, entrance/exit) and formulaic vocabulary requesting same. Material understood rarely exeeds a single phrase and comprehension requires successive rereading and checking.
Novice-High	Sufficient comprehension of the written language to interpret set expressions in areas of immediate need. Can recognize all the letters in the printed version of an alphabetic system and high-frequency elements of a syllabary or a character system. Where vocabulary has been mastered can read for instruction and directional purposes standardized messages, phrases or expressions such as some items on menus, schedules, timetables, maps and signs indicating hours of operation, social codes, and traffic

regulations. This material is read only for essential information. Detail is overlooked or misunderstood.

Intermediate-Low Sufficient comprehension to understand in printed form the simplest connected material, either authentic or specially prepared, dealing with basic survival and social needs. Able to understand both mastered material and recombinations of the mastered elements that achieve meanings at the same level. Understands main ideas in material whose structures and syntax parallel the native language. Can read messages, greetings, statements of social amenities or other simple language containing only the highest frequency grammatical patterns and vocabulary items including cognates (if appropriate). Misunderstandings arise when syntax diverges from that of the native language or when grammatical cues are overlooked.

Intermediate-Mid Sufficient comprehension to understand in printed form simple discourse for informative or social purposes. In response to perceived needs can read for information material such as announcements of public events, popular advertising, notes containing biographical information or narration of events, and straightforward newspaper headlines and story titles. Can guess at unfamiliar vocabulary if highly contextualized. Relies primarily on adverbs as time indicators. Has some difficulty with the cohesive factors in discourse, such as matching pronouns with referents. May have to read material several times before understanding.

Intermediate-High Sufficient comprehension to understand a simple paragraph for personal communication, information or recreational purposes. Can read with understanding social notes, letters and invitations; can locate and derive main ideas of the introductory/summary paragraphs from high interest or familiar news or other informational sources; can read for pleasure specially prepared, or some uncomplicated authentic prose, such as fictional narratives or cultural information. Shows spontaneity in reading by ability to guess at meaning from context. Understands common time indicators and can interpret some cohesive factors such as objective pronouns and simple clause connectors. Begins to relate sentences in the discourse to advance meaning, but cannot sustain understanding of longer discourse on unfamiliar topics. Misinterpretation still occurs with more complex patterns.

Advanced Sufficient comprehension to read simple authentic printed material or edited textual material within a familiar context. Can read uncomplicated but authentic prose on familiar subjects containing description and narration such as news items describing frequently occurring events, simple biographic information, social notices, and standard business letters. Can read edited texts such as prose fiction and contemporary culture. The prose is predominantly in

	familiar sentence patterns. Can follow essential points of written discussion at level of main ideas and some supporting ones with topics in a field of interest or where background exists. Some misunderstandings. Able to read the facts but cannot draw inferences.
Advanced Plus	Sufficient comprehension to understand most factual information in non-technical prose as well as some discussions on concrete topics related to special interests. Able to read for information and description, to follow sequence of events, and to react to that information. Is able to separate main ideas from lesser ones, and uses that division to advance understanding. Can locate and interpret main ideas and details in material written for the general public. Will begin to guess sensibly at new words by using linguistic context and prior knowledge. May react personally to material but does not yet detect subjective attitudes, values, or judgments in the writing.
Superior	Able to read standard newspaper items addressed to the general reader, routine correspondence reports and technical material in a field of interest at a normal rate of speed (at least 220 wpm). Readers can gain new knowledge from material on unfamiliar topics in areas of a general nature. Can interpret hypotheses, supported opinions and conjectures. Can also read short stories, novels, and other recreational literature accessible to the general public. Reading ability is not subject-matter dependent. Has broad enough general vocabulary that successful guessing resolves problems with complex structures and low-frequency idioms. Misreading is rare. Almost always produces correct interpretation. Able to read between the lines. May be unable to appreciate nuance or stylistics.

Provisional Generic Descriptions--Writing

Novice-Low	No functional ability in writing the foreign language.
Novice-Mid	No practical communicative writing skills. Able to copy isolated words or short phrases. Able to transcribe previously studied words or phrases.
Novice-High	Able to write simple fixed expressions and limited memorized material. Can supply information when requested on forms such as hotel registrations and travel documents. Can write names, numbers, dates, one's own nationality, addresses, and other simple biographic information, as well as learned vocabulary, short phrases, and simple lists. Can write all the symbols in an alphabetic or syllabic system or 50 of the most common characters. Can write simple memorized material with frequent misspellings and inaccuracies.

Intermediate-Low Has sufficient control of the writing system to meet limited practical needs. Can write short messages, such as simple questions or notes, postcards, phone messages, and the like within the scope of limited language experience. Can take simple notes on material dealing with very familiar topics although memory span is extremely limited. Can create statements or questions within the scope of limited language experience. Material produced consists of recombinations of learned vocabulary and structures into simple sentences. Vocabulary is inadequate to express anything but elementary needs. Writing tends to be a loosely organized collection of sentence fragments on a very familiar topic. Makes continual errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation, but writing can be read and understood by a native speaker used to dealing with foreigners. Able to produce appropriately some fundamental sociolinguistic distinctions in formal and familiar style, such as appropriate subject pronouns, titles of address and basic social formulae.

Intermediate-Mid Sufficient control of writing system to meet some survival needs and some limited social demands. Able to compose short paragraphs or take simple notes on very familiar topics grounded in personal experience. Can discuss likes and dislikes, daily routine, everyday events, and the like. Can express past time, using content words and time expressions, or with sporadically accurate verbs. Evidence of good control of basic constructions and inflections such as subject-verb agreement, noun-adjective agreement, and straightforward syntactic constructions in present or future time, though errors occasionally occur. May make frequent errors, however, when venturing beyond current level of linguistic competence. When resorting to a dictionary, often is unable to identify appropriate vocabulary, or uses dictionary entry in uninflected form.

Intermediate-High Sufficient control of writing system to meet most survival needs and limited social demands. Can take notes in some detail on familiar topics, and respond to personal questions using elementary vocabulary and common structures. Can write simple letters, brief synopses and paraphrases, summaries of biographical data and work experience, and short compositions on familiar topics. Can create sentences and short paragraphs relating to most survival needs (food, lodging, transportation, immediate surroundings and situations) and limited social demands. Can relate personal history, discuss topics such as daily life, preferences, and other familiar material. Can express fairly accurately present and future time. Can produce some past verb forms, but not always accurately or with correct usage. Shows good control of elementary vocabulary and some control of basic syntactic patterns but major errors still occur when expressing more complex thoughts. Dictionary usage may still yield incorrect

vocabulary of forms, although can use a dictionary to advantage to express simple ideas. Generally cannot use basic cohesive elements of discourse to advantage such as relative constructions, subject pronouns, connectors, etc. Writing, though faulty, is comprehensible to native speakers used to dealing with foreigners.

Advanced Able to write routine social correspondence and simple discourse of at least several paragraphs on familiar topics. Can write simple social correspondence, take notes, and write cohesive summaries, resumes, and short narratives and descriptions on factual topics. Able to write about everyday topics using both description and narration. Has sufficient writing vocabulary to express himself/herself simply with some circumlocution. Can write about a very limited number of current events or daily situations and express personal preferences and observations in some detail, using basic structures. Still makes common errors in spelling and punctuation, but shows some control of the most common formats and punctuation conventions. Good control of the morphology of the language (in inflected languages) and of the most frequently used syntactic structures. Elementary constructions are usually handled quite accurately, and writing is understandable to a native speaker not used to reading the writing of foreigners. Uses a limited number of cohesive devices such as pronouns and repeated words with good accuracy. Able to join sentences in limited discourse, but has difficulty and makes frequent errors in producing complex sentences. Paragraphs are reasonably unified and coherent.

Advanced Plus Shows ability to write about most common topics with some precision and in some detail. Can write fairly detailed resumes and summaries and take quite accurate notes. Can write most social and informal business correspondence. Can describe and narrate personal experiences and explain simply points of view in prose discourse. Can write about concrete topics relating to particular interests and special fields of competence. Normally controls general vocabulary with some circumlocution. Often shows remarkable fluency and ease of expression, but under time constraints and pressure language may be inaccurate and/or incomprehensible. Generally strong in either grammar or vocabulary, but not in both. Weaknesses and unevenness in one of the foregoing or in spelling result in occasional miscommunication. Areas of weakness range from simple contructions such as plurals, articles, prepositions, and negatives to more complex structures such as tense usage, passive constructions, word order, and relative clauses. Some misuse of vocabulary still evident. Shows a limited ability to use circumlocution. Uses dictionary to advantage to supply unknown words. Writing is understandable to native speakers not used to reading material written by non-natives, though the style is still obviously foreign.

Superior Able to use the written language effectively in most formal and informal exchanges on practical, social, and professional topics. Can write most types of correspondence, such as memos and social and business letters, short research papers and statements of position in areas of special interest or in special fields. Can express hypotheses, conjectures, and present arguments or points of view accurately and effectively. Can write about areas of special interest and handle topics in special fields, in addition to most common topics. Good control of a full range of structures, spelling, and wide general vocabulary allow the writer to convey his/her message accurately, though style may be foreign. Can use complex and compound sentence structures to express ideas clearly and coherently. Uses dictionary with a high degree of accuracy to supply specialized vocabulary. Errors, though sometimes made when using more complex structures, are occasional, and rarely disturb the native speaker. Sporadic errors when using basic structures. Although sensitive to differences in formal and informal style, still cannot tailor writing precisely and accurately to a variety of audiences or styles.

APPENDIX II: PROPOSED SCALE FOR FRENCH 4 PROFICIENCY

EXAMINATION:	POINTS: 5.00	10.00	15.00	20.00
	↕	↕ LEVEL	↕	↕
A. CEEB Language Achievement Test	450	500	550	600
B. FSI Oral Interaction	S-1	S-1+	S-2	S-2+
C. Listening Comprehension	5	10	15	20
D. Reading Comprehension	5	10	15	20
E. Writing	5	10	15	20
F. Culture	5	10	15	20

Explanation

1. All students will be required to take all 6 sections of the test as listed above. (See Chart--page 184--for a description of the Proficiency Standard at each level for each skill.)

2. Performance below 10 on any portion of the exam constitutes failure for that section.

3. *Cumulative performance* however is the ultimate criterion for passing. One may accrue from 0 to 20 points on each section but the cumulative average must be equal to 10 or higher (i.e., a student may fail sections of the exam and still pass the proficiency test: see examples a and b below). Those who fail below this average must retake the section which brought the average down, or may retake the entire exam.

4. Sample passing scores:

a)	CEEB	500	(=10.00)
	FSI	1	(= 5.00)
	LISTENING COMPREHENSION	70%	(=10.00)
	READING COMPREHENSION	85%	(=15.00)
	WRITING	55%	(= 5.00)
	CULTURE	85%	(=15.00)
	TOTAL		60.00 ÷ 6 = 10.00
b)	CEEB	475	(= 7.50)
	FSI	1+	(=10.00)
	LISTENING COMPREHENSION	75%	(=11.70)
	READING COMPREHENSION	85%	(=15.00)
	WRITING	80%	(=13.30)
	CULTURE	85%	(=15.00)
	TOTAL		72.50 ÷ 6 = 12.10